

From Bondage to Blacksmith: The Unbreakable Spirit of Charles A. Whiteside By Dr. Carolyn Haliburton Carter

The system of enslavement in America sought to erase African heritage, but those forced into bondage refused to be defined by it. My four-times great-grandfather, Charles Andrew **Whiteside**, was one such individual. His story is one of defiance, dignity, and the reclamation of identity.

The Making of a Master Blacksmith

Charles was born on the farm of Richard and Peggy Bond **Maury**, March 15, 1838, in Williams County, Tennessee. Through the enslavers' family relations, Charles went from being an enslaved of William P. **Weatherly** (from Coryell County, Texas,) to an enslaved of Robertson Whiteside in Hickman County, Tennessee. According to the 1860 Hickman County Deed books, there were more than 12,000 enslaved people and 11,000 white people living there. Charlie was sold four times, for prices ranging from \$400 to \$1,565. His blacksmithing skills made him valuable to his enslaver.

Charles would labor endlessly for "Old Man Whiteside," as Charlie would call him in the blacksmith shop, forging tools and horseshoes that sustained the local economy, yet he saw no reward for his craftsmanship. Only after gaining his freedom did Charles begin to benefit directly from his trade. He eventually established himself as Centerville's sole blacksmith, earning both a livelihood and the respect that had long been denied to him.



A Family Torn Apart

The cruelty of enslavement extended beyond forced labor—it shattered families. His mother, Jane **Bond**, was born into slavery on the Bond Plantation, Fairfax County, VA; she was a house servant on various plantations for 51 years. When Charles was just ten years old in 1848, he witnessed his mother, Jane, and younger brother, Guss, sold to a Texas trader by the name Captain John Walker **Mayberry** and his wife Mahulda Ann **Easley**.

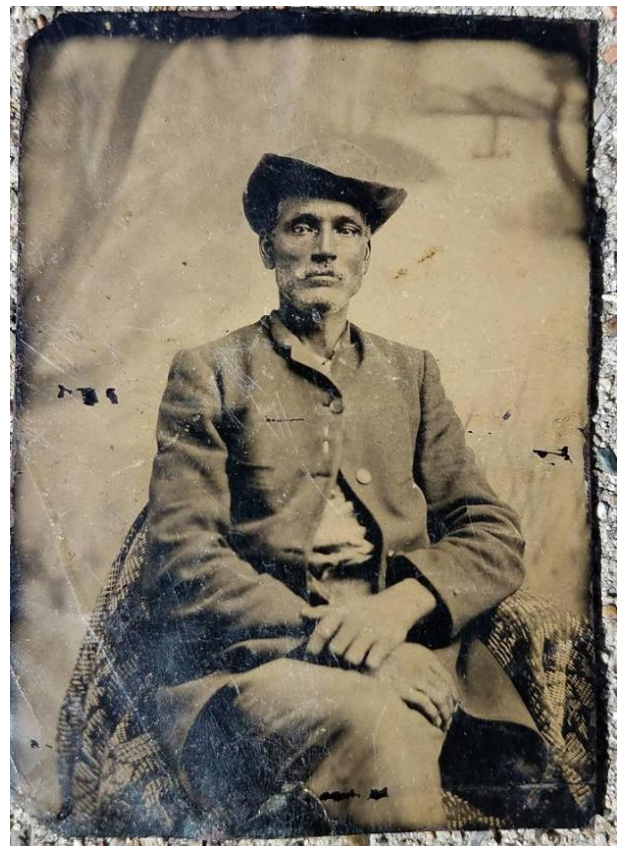
In 1860, the Mayberrys, along with Jane and Gus, traveled from Hickman County, Tennessee, to Texas. Jane had two children and a new husband, Tobe Mayberry. Jane would later have a total of five children with Tobe. Her son Guss returned to the surname Weatherly, married and had several children in Texas.

After the Civil War, and a half century later in 1901, Charlie found his brother Guss, and reunited with his mother Jane **Bond Mayberry** in Lincolnville, Texas, just hours before she died at the age of 78. She is buried at Oak Grove Cemetery in Gatesville, Texas, next to her son Gus, who died in 1930. Charlie never knew his sisters, Harriett and Easter Mayberry. No records indicate that Charlie ever found his two sisters in Tennessee, Ann and Ana **Weatherly**. His story underscores the enduring pain inflicted by the forced separation of families—a trauma that lingered for generations.

Forced Service in the Confederacy

As the Civil War raged, Charles longed for freedom, but was instead conscripted into the Confederate army, forced to serve as a slave to his owner's son, Lafayette "Fate" **Whiteside**. The irony was cruel - he was made to support the very cause that sought to keep him in bondage. Later when Fate was sent home to care for the Whiteside family, Charlie went also.

Charlie carried the emotional weight of this injustice all of his life. After the war, in 1921, he applied for a pension from the United States, seeking compensation for his forced service; but serving in the Confederacy rendered him "a traitor," and he could not get any financial support from the United States. Finally, after 54 years, Charles was approved for a pension from the State of Tennessee. He was 83 years old by that time. According to his pension application, Charles received \$9.50 per month, with his final payment issued on January 6, 1940, to his estate, a stark reminder of how little the system valued the lives and labor of former slaves, even in freedom.



Civil War pension payments increased gradually over time, beginning at \$8 per month in 1862 for fully disabled Union privates. By 1912, legislation raised that amount to a maximum of \$30 per month for veterans of both the Civil War and the Mexican War. In contrast, white Confederate veterans often received significantly more, with some pensions reaching \$115 annually. Meanwhile, Black veterans received less; for instance, in South Carolina, their pensions were capped at just \$25 annually.¹

¹ "Black Confederate Pensioners after the Civil War - 2008-05." Ms.gov, 2025, mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/issue/black-confederate-pensioners-after-the-civil-war.

Triumph in the Face of Adversity



Despite everything he endured, Charles built a life of dignity. Affectionately known as “Uncle Charlie” and “Father Whiteside,” he became a pillar of his community. A devoted family man and active member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, he ensured his thirteen children (one son and twelve daughters) all received an education. By 1900, Charlie had buried ten of his children.

Charles’ commitment to learning stemmed from the words of Robertson Whiteside: “You will still be a slave because you got no education, and education is what makes a man free.” Charles dedicated himself to proving him wrong. He was not defined by his enslaver; even as a proud servant; Charlie would say after the war, “That’s what he bought me for.” He understood the perils of enslavement, but he also knew his value.

At the time of his death at 101, Charles had forged a legacy of perseverance and self-determination. I am a descendant from James **Whiteside**, one of the surviving three. As of the 2024 family reunion, there are nine generations and over 600 living descendants to honor his memory, embodying the strength that carried him through unimaginable trials.

A Legacy of Strength

Charles Whiteside’s life exemplifies how African Americans resisted oppression and reclaimed their identities. His journey from bondage to blacksmithing success is not just a family story—it is part of a larger history of survival, ingenuity, and cultural preservation. The skills he mastered were not gifts of enslavement, but testaments to his resilience and initiative. Narratives that suggest enslaved people “benefited” by learning trades such as blacksmithing, carpentry, or cooking distort the truth. As historian Gregory Nobles states, “This attempt to make enslavement seem like some kind of apprenticeship just seems to be an absurd way to approach it.”² Skilled laborers like Charles succeeded *despite* their oppression—not because of it.

² Niddle, N. (2023, July 26). *Florida education officials say these women benefited from slavery. Here’s the truth.* The 19th. Retrieved September 7, 2023, from <https://19thnews.org/2023/07/women-slavery-benefits-florida-department-of-education/>

As I reflect on his life, I recognize that the strength of my ancestors flows through me, and their struggles fuel my determination to share their stories. The fight for justice and equality continues, and Charles's legacy reminds us all to rise above adversity, just as he did. History's lessons are not to be forgotten but carried forward, guiding us with the unwavering spirit of those who came before us. Charles refused to be defined by his past, and neither will I.
I am the hopes and dreams of my ancestors!

Sources Used

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Images are from the personal collections in the Whiteside Family Archives.

About the Author: Dr. Carolyn Haliburton Carter is a professional genealogist, researcher, and historian (<https://www.thekitchengenealogist.com/>). She and her cousin Rachel Cassie Wheeler are the Whiteside family historians. Together, they keep the life and legacy of Charlie A. Whiteside alive with intensive research, documentation, family reunions and family stories.